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TRACK
OFF
ROAD





Photo: Jeff Kardas

TOMMY SEARLE

MONSTER ENERGY DRT KAWASAKI



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O

AMA-MX

All in the head...

A sixth career win for Ken Roczen in Texas last week-end pulls the German slightly closer to Ryan Dungey as the AMA 450SX class starts to narrow into a duel between the two former (and possibly future once again?) teammates. 23 points is the difference with Atlanta next and the halfway stage of the series approaching. Dungey has still to be dislodged from the podium after a 23 race and one year streak

Photo by Simon Cudby



MotoGP

Sunshine breaks through...

Another turbulent climate afflicted MotoGP's attempts to get serious work for 2016 under their belts at Phillip Island but despite hitting the Aussie tarmac HRC and Marc Marquez posted times around the speedy layout that gave room for encouragement

Photo by Repsol Honda





**MX**

Which way now?

Sunday afternoon from Valence brought some surprising news with the left arm break for Clement Desalle dashing any hopes of a strong early blast-off for the Belgian's link with the Monster Energy Kawasaki team. Some mystery hovers over Desalle's exact recovery time from the Radius fracture. How long will MXGP miss the speedy Panda?

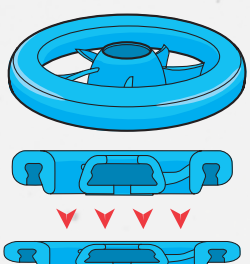
Photo by Ray Archer







HEAD AND BRAIN PROTECTION



The diagram shows a top-down view of a blue circular turbine with four blades. Below it are two side views of the turbine, showing its profile and the four blades. Red arrows point downwards from the bottom view, indicating the direction of airflow or impact reduction.

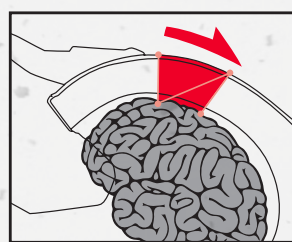
RISK OF CONCUSSION

Helmet Type	Risk Level
Normal Helmet	High
Leatt® Helmet	Low

360° TURBINES LOWER CONCUSSION RISK

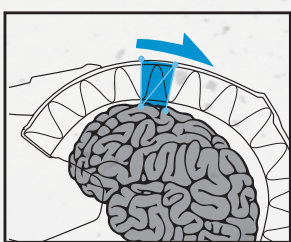
Reduces up to 30% of head impact at concussion level and Up to 40% reduction of rotational acceleration to the head & brain

Normal Helmet



The diagram shows a cross-section of a normal helmet with a large red arrow pointing from the outer shell towards the brain, indicating high force transfer.

Leatt® Helmet



The diagram shows a cross-section of a Leatt helmet with a blue arrow pointing from the outer shell towards the brain, indicating reduced force transfer.

COMPACT OUTER SHELL REDUCES FORCES

Reduces forces transferred to neck. A 10% smaller shell transfers up to 20% less momentum and rotational energy to the head & brain.

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FEATURE



MXGP 2016: THE QATAR Q's

MXGP

2016

THE Q's FOR QATAR

By Adam Wheeler, 2015 photos by Ray Archer

As if to enforce the notion that nobody can predict how or in what direction an MXGP campaign will head...the 2016 FIM Motocross World Championship once more launches into life in the midst of the Losail desert setting. Grand Prix begins in Qatar for the fourth successive year. As with most opening events of motorcycle racing series', trying to foresee what will come to pass is a dizzy task as any precursors of form have been obfuscated by a lengthy winter and unexpected injury hitches. As for the riders themselves come this Saturday night, here is a stab in the dark at some of the issues and questions for round one...

HOW MANY RIDERS ARE WE LOOKING AT?

The official entry list has 24 in the premier class and 27 in MX2 with the first of seven rounds in the Women's World Championship also commencing at the floodlit race track located a short distance from Turn 1 of the road racing asphalt. From MXGP names like Desalle (possibly), Tixier, De Dycker, Karro and Rui Gonçalves have already been struck by injury, which also hits presence in the gate.

WHO IS NEW IN MXGP?

With the high-profile exception of 2015 MX2 World Champion Honda Gariboldi's Tim Gajser joining the ranks and undoubtedly looking for some of the 'Romain Febvre Effect' it is more of a case of 'who is where?' Watch for Grand Prix of Latvia winner Glenn Coldenhoff making his first outing on the works Red Bull KTM 450SX-F in what is the Dutchman's second term in MXGP. Three times MX2 runner-up Tommy Searle made way for Coldenhoff from the KTM squad but is back in Monster Energy Kawasaki colours as Steve Dixon's British crew hope to have as much impact in MXGP as they have in MX2 in recent years. Former European Champion and MX2 moto winner Christophe Charlier will ride as number two in the works Rockstar Husqvarna team to 2015 Qatar GP victor Max Nagl while the surprising – but entirely welcome – addition of Ben Townley on the official Suzuki RM-Z450 (and the first event for the team and manufacturer in the 'Stefan Everts era') means another strong name added to the pack. Townley has been busy over the last month testing and training alongside a fully fit Kevin Strijbos and has been nearing the Belgian's pace. Expect a solid start to 2016 from the experienced ex-multi champion who knows that Qatar is simply the first rung in a long eight-month ladder. Watch out for the lively Valentin Guillod – winner of three MX2 Grands Prix in 2015 – also making his debut in the premier class from the confines of the busy Kemea Yamaha set-up.



MAJOR CHANGES TO THE TRACK?

None reported. Losail has largely remained the same since its inauguration with the QMMF overseeing a larger investment in permanent lighting provisions after the first race in 2013 and minor revisions to the layout and terrain prep. A fast sweeping opening left-hander hits a section of rollers and then a flat, jumpy but wide and modern layout then lies in store. Depending on the amount of watering and soil treatment then the surface can actually get quite rutty and technical in parts. The last jump zone before the finish line involved a daunting Quad jump; something that Max Anstie made his own in 2014 although the Briton crashed out heavily twelve months ago. '14 also, bizarrely, saw some rainfall briefly hit the Grand Prix timetable. Riders have to deal with a switch in temperatures some 10-15 degrees higher than found in Europe for the time of year. Other curveballs for this first GP involve the night timetable (the last MXGP moto starts at 21.10 local time on Saturday), the lighting system and the fact that the paddock operates out of freight, meaning relatively little creature comforts for the athletes at arguably the nerviest meeting of the schedule.



THE PODIUM-MOST-LIKELY-BASED-ON-PRE-SEASON...

OK, pre-season internationals can mean relatively little. Riders and teams are still testing and building into the racing campaign and many athletes will not be pushing at a hard rate in the name of minimising risk. There will be some however who have firmly sharpened their racing chops and could come into the weekend feeling less rusty, more prepared and – importantly – more confident than others. Based on results and hearsay regarding performances then the first Grand Prix of the year should see Evgeny Bobryshev, Shaun Simpson and Jeremy Van Horebeek walking the podium. The Russian earned the Italian elite crown and has made an unprecedented step with his pre-season training (read OTOR #122 for the details), Simpson has won Internationals at Hawkstone Park and Valence on the factory-engined Wilvo Virus Performance KTM and already exorcised a raft of mistakes after several crashes at the LaCapelle Marival meeting last weekend (the Scot still finished third) and a lighter and more motivated Van Horebeek took MX1 Italian honours and has earned good reviews for his progress from within the Yamaha factory team.

PREVIOUS WINNERS?

Clement Desalle (with Suzuki), Gautier Paulin (with Kawasaki) and Max Nagl with his current Husqvarna team. In MX2 Jeffrey Herlings has won all three editions, which leads onto...



CAN HERLINGS BE BEATEN IN MX2?

In a word: no. The Dutchman came into the 2014 and 2015 Qatar round worried about fitness and form and still claimed overall success. '84' has only lost one of the six motos run at Losail and during the pre-season period has been utterly unbeatable in three different countries and varying terrain and conditions. 2015 World Champion Tim Gajser has gone, Valentin Guillod – one of the few to legitimately beat Herlings since 2013 – also, while Red Bull KTM teammate and '15 runner-up Pauls Jonass is nursing a tweaked right thumb. There are a few more changes in the class with Alex Tonkov taking Guillod's Yamaha saddle and lead status in blue and a brand new Husqvarna line-up with Anstie and sole U.S. representative Thomas Covington on the sprightly 250FC. Mystery surrounds Monster Energy Kawasaki's Dylan Ferrandis (who won the first moto in Qatar in 2014) and his potential on the KX250F that is now apparently under an engine development scheme managed by the Dixon Racing Team. Watch out for the progression made by the likes of Benoit Paturel, Vsevolod Brylyakov, Jeremy Seewer, Petar Petrov, Brent Van Doninck and Brian Bogers.





TOP THREE QUESTION MARKS FOR QATAR:

Gautier Paulin's form: The Motocross of Nations winner has been clocking up the miles in the U.S. as part of Aldon Baker's training regime and for what will be the South African trainer's first strong link to MXGP. Paulin's jet-setting means that relatively little of his 2016 potential has yet to be seen in the early months of the year. The soon-to-be 26 year old is working with Baker to eradicate any possible doubts about his capability to go one position further than 2015 and take the MXGP crown. It means the onus will fall on the CRF450RW and the way HRC can get the motorcycle to his liking. One Grand Prix win last season indicated that there was work to be done behind the scenes and perhaps a change to the way Honda bring around wholesale changes. If these two click – with Jean Michel Bayle now into a second year in the gap between riders and Honda management – then it will be a formidable combination. Many MXGP observers were expecting both Paulin and Honda needing time to gel and although 2015 should have delivered more, second position in the championship was by no means a disaster. 2016 is perhaps the most important year of Paulin's career. He simply *has* to deliver the goods with the world's biggest motorcycle manufacturer and racing division behind him. He is reaching his peak in terms of age, experience and fitness and finishes his contract this year, meaning a season of spoils will set him up for a bumper few seasons in MXGP or a long-awaited move to the USA.



Tony Cairoli's fitness: At thirty years of age the former eight times world champion is a racing animal, and in any other pre-season he would have completed an Italian Championship schedule by now. Fractured ribs has kept '222' away from competition and means that Qatar could see a few cobwebs in terms of starts and the hustle and bustle of the opening turns of a first lap but like any sporting 'giant' the Red Bull KTM man cannot be discounted. It's hard to get exact details but I would wager that Cairoli has already been clocking up the riding miles this month...but just away from the chances of a mishap during a moto. He will come to Doha with a 450SX-F fully fettled to his needs and likes for the first time and has already publicly admitted that he has no qualms with another rider coping with the spotlight as defending champion. Another crown in 2015 could have rubbed away a little more of the Sicilian's motivation to keep pushing at the highest level. That he was undone by injury and is now in the unfamiliar position of chasing another 'number one' means we could see some vintage speed from Tony. Will that come at Qatar? He has not won the Grand Prix at Losail so a 'first' could be the first sign of a resilient fightback to the pinnacle of MXGP.



Tim Gajser's MXGP potential: The Slovenian's late decision to vault out of MX2 caught a few people on the hop, especially Honda. Those who saw his pace at the 2014 Motocross of Nations in Latvia on a CRF450RW know that the nineteen year old can handle the bigger bike and he has admitted in interviews that he used the 450 for training even while competing in MX2. A muscular athlete and one that is heavy on the gas; Gajser has the seeds planted to cause a few shocks in 2016. Some have questioned the move to leave MX2 but examining '243's career shows that he has rarely hung around in a class after making his mark. With a fascination and desire to try Supercross and taste AMA competition Gajser could be looking at 2016 as a fast-track to widen his options through what is a multi-year contract with HRC. A decent term could see him pushed into the MXGP works outfit or maybe Stateside. He is one of the authentic dark horses for Qatar alongside Bobryshev and Simpson.



MXGP 2016: THE QATAR Q's

CAN KIARA FONTANESI WIN ON THE HONDA?

A big change for the four-times World Champion going to Losail in what will be the third visit for the ladies to Qatar. Fontanesi has ridden a Yamaha in all five of her Grand Prix terms but split from Yamaha Motor Europe support in the winter and will now pilot a privately entered Honda from the confines of her own Fonta Racing Team. Her speed on the CRF250R is unknown in relation to peers such as Livia Lancetot (on a Kawasaki once more and winner in Qatar 2015) and Yamaha's Nancy Van De Ven. The desert-set Grand Prix has not been kind to the Italian in the past with crashes casting her away from the podium in 2014 and a firm second to her French rival twelve months ago. A dream first Honda triumph would make a big statement for the series.



WILL ROMAIN FEBVRE BE THE MAN TO CATCH?

It might take only a few laps for the world champion to slip into the same groove with which he finished 2015. If this happens then everyone will swiftly know who they must follow. Like Cairoli, Febvre has been dealing with an early injury in 2016 but had the stitches in his right elbow removed last week and has already been riding the factory Yamaha in anger. Comprehensive tests with the Italian crew for his second term in the premier class have focussed on the starting prowess of the YZ450FM so watch out for this in Qatar. Febvre insists he is fit and ready to go...but the opening round will present a different experience for 461 where he will have to carry the weighty mantle of 'reigning world champ' and deal with the demands and pressure that rolls-with. Romain will have a busy time when he touches down in Doha but once free on the Yamaha don't forget that the recently-turned 24 year old aced his very first career Grand Prix podium finish around Losail in MX2 back in 2013.



WHAT FOR KAWASAKI?

While the reigning world champions will be getting their Superbike defence underway further east and around Phillip Island with perhaps the strongest line-up on the SBK grid, back in Qatar the factory MX team have been left decimated by the wrist complications for rookie Jordi Tixier and the left radius break for Clement Desalle. Tixier is certainly out of the game but Desalle is having his injury constantly monitored after sustaining the break ten days ago (thirteen days will split the crash and the motos at Losail) at the Valence International. If the Belgian somehow makes the trip then expect a careful points-gathering exercise to remain part of the outlook for the '16 title saga.





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Last week 100% unveiled their new **Racecraft** and **Accuri** goggles for the spring season with an array of designs from 'Antigua' to 'Zoolander' and a total of 22 liveries for the Racecraft alone. We like the look of the Ultrasonic that will clearly catch the eye(s) of KTM riders thanks to that orange hue. Looking through their website in more details 100% have a seven-point guideline to the tech specs of their goggles that involve: 1) outriggers helping to achieve perfect fit and balance. 2) removable nose guard; the attachment of the nose guard ensures stability and protection in the most testing conditions. 3) foam; thirsty triple layer moisture managing foam. 4) lens; anti-fog coated Lexan lens for flawless vision and the same lens shape across the product line. 5) strap; 45mm wide, Silicon coated strap eliminates slippage. 6) lens attachment; 9 pin lens retention system. The highest number of retention points in the industry ensures a secure fit. 7) air intakes; patent pending technology channels air into the foam, aiding in moisture management.

Both the Racecraft and the Accuri look good, fit good, work good and are reasonably priced in the 65-75 dollar bracket with an extra lens, tear-offs, the noseguard and a microfiber bag also in the box. It's simply a case of picking the colours you like...

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RUNNING UP THAT HILL

AFTER A RAMPANT PRE-SEASON PERIOD WHERE ONE OF GRAND PRIX RACING' ENDURING SOULS AND MATURING STARS HAS AGAIN SENT OUT SOME POTENT WARNING SIGNS WE WANTED TO KNOW WHETHER **SHAUN SIMPSON** COULD GO BIGGER AND BETTER IN 2016...

By Adam Wheeler, Photos by Ray Archer

SHAUN SIMPSON ON MXGP '16



An air of the underdog is finally beginning to evaporate from Shaun Simpson. A rider who has seemingly fought some form of adversity (food allergies, a lack of belief by others, brief factory chances, a team misfit, privateer status) ever since the brutal leg break that disrupted his moment at the big time in 2009 while a fresh-faced MX2 athlete in the works Red Bull KTM crew. Simpson has extolled the by-gone virtues of the sport in the past two years in what was largely a two-man band in the homely Hitachi set-up; him and his Dad winning races repeatedly in the UK and throwing rocks without a sling against the goliaths of MXGP.

The 27 year old has proved his doubters wrong. He was unbeaten in Britain in 2015 and became only the second rider from this country to win a Grand Prix in the premier class of the FIM World Championship since 2001 (if we count the 250s as 'MXGP'). With three GP victories in MXGP he holds a notable distinction as the UK's most successful athlete and has evolved his sand capabilities to be considered as one of the very best in the world through the terrain.

Spoils? Check. Validation? Check. Success the 'hard way'? Check. So what now? With factory assistance through Steve Turner's Wilvo Virus Performance KTM team Simpson finally has the tools and the treatment – not forgetting the experience, maturity and know-how – to sit in his most prosperous position since Yamaha decided to bounce him around Steve Dixon and Michele Rinaldi's factory outfits in 2012.

'24' has faced questions repeatedly throughout his career (like most high-profile competitors) but many MXGP observers will be curious to

see if he can get even better and elevate further that rigid approach to consistency while maintaining a firm 'bigger picture' of racing and Grand Prix, namely 'lasting the distance'. After asking Shaun to bring his training clobber to an identifiable Scottish landscape and visually trying to encapsulate his preparation and attitude for 2016 and arguably his most important season yet, we got him behind the Dictaphone.

OK, so, the big question: Did Shaun Simpson arrive at a peak in 2015 or is there more to come?

I think there is definitely more to come-

Well, I guess you would say that...

Yeah! But I finally feel that I have the evidence to back it up because – as I always say in interviews – I have been a slow-burner and I just get better with experience. I've managed to win the British Championship the last two years and I think the way I did it last season was very convincing. I feel that I can do it again and after two good years I'm still building up. It's to do with momentum and you just keep adding to it. I'm talking about fitness and speed and the general lack of a major break or disruption to the schedule. In GPs I've gone from 11th to 7th to 4th and I know to beat fourth in the world is going to be a hard task. However if I strip back 2015 and look at how the first half of my season went then there is heaps of room for improvement. If I can raise-up my whole season then we will see again where we finish. Whether it is better than fourth place could be a whole other story. I have better tools to go racing, better machinery and a better structure behind me. I feel I can go out there and do a good professional job rather than being handed the tools to do just a job.



You could perhaps say you are hitting maximum output in the sand: winning two out of the three sandy Grands Prix is a pretty damn good ratio. Even going undefeated in the UK was special. Your head must be in the best place yet for your career...

I think you have to be mentally strong and look at the year as a whole, and not crumble if one race goes wrong. Between MXGP and the 'British' I'll have twenty-six weekends of racing and of course not all of them are going to go right for me; even if the first few don't go well then there is little point crying and instead work on where you are weak. 2016 is my third year on a KTM and I'm on the same bike that I ended the '15 season. I feel that I am so much further ahead than I should be or would have been. I am in such a good position and I'm comfortable, confident and strong. I want the results I feel I can achieve.

I know it is some way-off and that you have to get through the opening stages of the '16 season but a weak point for you is finishing the climax of a championship year. Crashes and problems affected you in the last rounds of both 2014 and 2015...

It is frustrating for me to look at those stats because I pride myself on finishing races, motos and qualifying laps and finishing them strong. In both years things were going so well. In 2014 I had climbed up to fifth in the championship before the crash in Brazil and last year I had the podium in Mexico before it all went to shit at the last round. The Nations also! They were bad races but they could have happened at any point in the season. You have to take the rough-with-the-smooth, analyse the reasons why a race went wrong and get over it. You cannot be dragging low points like that around with you.

On a positive note it is hard to remember a GP where you struggled or faded and that must be a testament to your fitness...

And a testament to the experience I've picked up over the last three or four seasons. I've tailored my programme to the knowledge I have accumulated in my career. Together with my trainer Kev from Step1 Fitness – who has customised such a good programme – we are looking to go even better and take profit of the better structure I have. Now I just have to arrive at the track, do my job and then go home and carry on doing my job instead of worrying about building a bike or organising travel or equipment carnets. I'm taking that side of it to the next level by recovering, sleeping and eating better this year. Everything is on another level. Overall I think I have made big steps this winter and I'm excited to see where I am when it comes to being on the race track.



But you were working hard before...is it really that simple to push harder?

I think so. Look at Ryan Dungey and Ken Roczen with Aldon Baker; it is about teaching yourself what works for you and being disciplined. It sounds a bit far-fetched but you have to make every day on this earth count towards an end goal. Every meal, every early night, every workout: it is the little things that turn out to make a big difference. Finding someone who can guide you in the right direction helps. I've actually drafted in two-three people to help me this year and I am mentally stronger for how it is all coming together and contributing.

Speaking of 'harmony', I remember you looking more into sport psychology during the latter part of 2015. I imagine it is something you don't want to discuss the details of too much but what is it all about and what effect is it having? Were you sceptical...?

People can be judgemental but I can say that I am working on areas of being a Pro rider that I hadn't before. Of course I was – and am – sceptical about it; I'm twenty-seven years old and I have been doing Grands Prix for eleven years and have had some amazing results but everyone else there in MXGP is looking for that extra little edge. If this is what it takes for me to get that tiny advantage over the rest of the paddock then so be it and I'm pretty sure nobody else has been doing the things I have done this off-season. It might not involve raw speed or fitness but it is about being mentally resolute behind the gate and knowing you are prepared for those two motos across eighteen rounds and six months. Knowing that you have done everything you can for these races gives you confidence. No stone unturned.

Any examples? Like, say, linguistic programming and saying to yourself over and over: "I will get a good start"...

Yeah, there are things like that but it is more of a process of re-programming your mind. Stripping back everything that you think or may have thought about your racing and your habits. It is then about finding and working on your weaknesses. Everyone knows where they are strong but it was quite interesting for me to find out where I was struggling mentally and it was with things that I never expected. So you break that down and build it up in the right way with certain techniques that you can do in the morning or before and after training sessions. Writing things down, keeping diaries and being much more professional about it. I would be happy to tell someone that I'm a Pro athlete now, whereas in the past I've been a guy that has achieved success and told people that I was a 'motorbike rider'. Now I am living like an athlete and that has come from these techniques. It takes about a month to break a habit and once you've done it then you don't want to turn back. I feel like a changed man!

So what would a weakness have been before? Something to do with routine?

Massively. My routine before was not good enough. It was up-and-down and sleep patterns were shit, general habits and the process of getting my body ready for a weekend of racing. There has to be a structure and I don't know the correct terminology for it all at the moment! You have to get your body into a state so that it knows when it is 'go-time' and to get everything out of it; these techniques are helping with that and it is all backed up with stats and research and athletes in other sports are doing this stuff. It is nothing new...but new to me. I want to be able to podium at any given GP this year and not just the sand or soft terrain races so I've been in Spain and Italy already getting that blue groove practice.





A photograph of a stone tower, likely a lighthouse or marker, perched on a dark, jagged rock formation. The tower is made of light-colored stone and has a small rectangular opening near its base. The cliff face is steep and covered in dark, irregular rocks. In the foreground, a rocky path leads up the cliff. To the left, the ocean is visible, with waves crashing against the rocks. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

Judging by the photoshoot it seems like Scott have really hooked you up for 2016 training. A handy advantage with a firm renowned for their goggles but then mountain, ski sports and bikes...

It's my second year with Scott and I'm blown away by the quality to be honest. From the eyewear to the apparel I would say they are every bit as good as a brand like Oakley. For the goggles the whole manufacturing process, the glue, the rubbers and material are all top-quality; they do such a good job. One of the best things is that they are always aspiring for better. They want feedback, they want tests, they make reports; if you do your own modification to the goggle then they want to know why and whether it is something they can work into the production. The road bikes, mountain bikes, running shoes, compression wear; it feels like nothing is bereft of thought or careful design. The bike in particular has a set of components that just fit together well and work in harmony. You won't get frustrated by problems when you are trying to train because some bikes with a decent spec just don't work as well as they should.

You jumped out of the KTM factory team at the end of 2010. Do you think it is fair to say that your ties with the manufacturer now are the strongest they have been since that time, especially considering you were their top MXGP rider in 2015...

Yeah definitely. I feel like I have done a great job for KTM in the last two years, let's say. I've always been a bit on the backburner for them and was never really in the limelight, even when I was on the factory bike at the end of the season. I didn't feel too much pressure from them but also that they weren't overly pumped with what I was doing. I am just happy that they make resources available. They don't throw it at you but if you ask the right people in the right way and go about things professionally then there is stuff available to get to the next level. That's what excites me about KTM; whether you've bought a stock bike or you're factory supported or a full factory rider there always feels like there is more you can tap into. You need to know what you want, test properly and make the right decisions because the higher up the tree you go there are more decisions to make. It comes down to rider preference. I think this is where Cairoli went wrong in 2015. He didn't make the right decisions and was caught in an early part of the season questioning himself over whether the others had stepped it up, he was struggling or he needed a change of bike. He seemed to be in turmoil for a little while over the 450 and eventually got injured. Guys like Max Nagl, for instance, came into the season very strong mentally having done his work and with a great feeling on the bike. When the 2016 model came in then he was strong enough to say: "I don't want that set-up, I'm going to run this and then test in the winter". Not everyone likes that type of approach but you have to appreciate that the guy sitting on the seat knows what he wants. If you get a team around you that support you 100% and you don't take the piss by getting them running around in circles then you build something together. I feel good in the position I have with KTM and Steve Turner's

team and if I ask for something they try to make it happen. I don't know how the link with the factory will be once the season starts and it is a bit like we are doing our own thing at the moment. We'll see if it changes but I think we are capable enough as a team to really hone our own package.

Leading up to Qatar then your name it is likely to be seen in articles associated with factory status. But what does that mean? Will you have the same 450s as Cairoli and Coldenhoff?

I don't know exactly and maybe I am talking out of turn but so far all I have been given is a large black box with an engine in it. For factory components and titanium parts like Tony and Glenn would have then - at the moment - those are not there. I currently have the same as any KTM-supported rider but a works engine as well. I don't know if I can expect more. There are different guys at the factory who have different ideas on what I will be receiving so it is quite a difficult question to answer at the moment.

You're not really a privateer any more, no more Willie Simpson on the spanners and a wedding to look forward to in October. 2016 is set to be a bit of a life-changer isn't it...?

It is! I can only say that things have slotted into place really well. I've come off the back of two great seasons with Roger's [Magee] Hitachi team and working closely with my Dad I think that people should have the upmost respect for what we have managed to achieve. My Dad always told me that he would step-down or head back home when he felt that I'd be going to a team that would cater for me correctly. When I started talking with Steve then I made it clear that I wanted the proper support structure. My Dad was turning 60 and I was searching for the right facilities like a race and practice mechanic and the capability to concentrate solely on myself. Rachel has made a life-changing decision to come out to Belgium with me and our relationship is good

and strong. We've been away from Scotland for a few weeks now and my parents seem very happy. Steve has provided me with an environment that is pretty much the same as factory. There might be some works riders that don't have it as good as I do! So, big changes...but all these points are positive. I'll miss my Dad at some point but these are massive changes for my future and they had to happen eventually. I want to get married and start a family and it was the perfect time for it all to come together. I think the timing of things was something I worried about in the past.



In the last two years you seemed to become a journeyman racer. You'd pop up in Belgian and Dutch internationals as well as GPs and British Championship dates. In 2015 you added an AMA National and the Lille Supercross! Will you keep that kind of scheduling?

I don't know really but I cannot imagine changing things too much. I've tailored my profession to keeping busy. I like to go to these obscure places and you never know whom you will meet. It is easy to stay indoors, miss races and worry about injury. You and I have had a few conversations about Lille and the risks involved with suddenly doing supercross but I have honestly not had as much fun at a race outside of the world championship in years! I had an absolute blast and went home from an event where people questioned whether I could ride well and whether I should be taking the risk to feeling like I had really 'lived'. I had ticked that one off the list and I'd happily sign up for it next year. It was great, a great atmosphere. Such hype. Stuff like Unadilla widened my reach and gave me exposure to a lot of new people. It is so easy to narrow down your sport to one thing but you might look back at your career and think 'that was boring'. Why not mix it up and do things that excite you...?

So a honeymoon could involve the Monster Energy Cup?

Haha, actually the biggest obstacle at the moment with the finale of the season and my wedding – which I am looking forward to immensely – is that the Manufacturer's Cup has now been scheduled the same weekend.

No representation for KTM there then...

No chance...

What about moving from one (ex) KTM team to another? Was that a bit controversial?

I think the best way to put this is that every team in the paddock has the same right to talk to me...as they would do for any other rider. If someone can put together a package that interests me then there is no harm in talking.

If I get an offer in black-and-white with terms and conditions for a ride then others also get a chance to match or better it; that's how contracts work. I don't think you should see it as me leaving one KTM team for another but rather just one team to another. I think there was quite a difference between my old team and my new one in terms of the structures behind them for the rider. The number one thing a team can look to is their rider because he is the guy on the track getting results for the sponsors that the team can bring in. It is as simple as that for me. Steve put in black-and-white what he could do for me and there was time for anybody else to come in and present me with the same. It is not personal. Without Roger setting up the team and then giving me the last two years I might not be where I am today...but without my Dad supporting me I could say the same thing.

Lastly, is it hard to keep motivated for another British title? You backed up the title in 2014 with a perfect season. How about going to the line with the same intensity?

There is only one way to better 2015 and that's to win every moto! I lost three last year and I have to try and better that. I know there are a couple of other riders coming into the series but the team are supplying me with the tools to do a job and I honestly think I can get the job done again. 'Four times British Champion' will look good on the CV, so would 'five times' actually. The British Championship for me is hectic, but I'm pleased they have gone back to the two race format and it won't be so hurried. It is also a good opportunity for the fans to see you. Racing is about fans. If they don't go home motivated and buy parts and clothing then we wouldn't have sponsorship, teams and racing. You have to give something back and I think I've been quite smart there with the 'Simpson Army' and put effort into things whereby people feel they can come along and watch somebody that appreciates them. I'm happy to do that and feel like I am putting on a show for the people who enjoy watching and supporting you. That's what I am trying to do with the 'British'.



SHAUN SIMPSON ON MXGP '16





SIMPSON: THE ALTERNATIVE ESSENTIALS...

What other sport or activity is as exciting as motocross and why?

Probably Downhill Mountain Biking. But then I would say that. For me it's probably the fact that it's still got two wheels and you could get the same intense adrenaline hit that motocross gives me. It's really physical, mentally tough from a concentration point of view and bloody good fun. I think in general something that still gets my heart rate going: enjoyment and a set of handlebars.

What inspires you and why?

Inspiration for me can come from anywhere or any sport. Just watching a sporting 'great' or someone else at the top of their game achieve their goal makes me want to go out and achieve mine. Ultimately though, inspiration has to come from within... Deep down you still need the desire to win and the dedication to work hard to reach the top.

What was the last film where you thought 'good one'?

Ride Along

Last album bought and last one that you really enjoy?

Calvin Harris' one

Why don't you listen to music in the gate?

I'm not really a massive music person. That's not to say that a good tune doesn't get me in the mood. I have tried it before and it can get in the way of chatting to your mechanic just before the race or going over the fine details of the bike. It may be something that you see me doing more this year though... Watch this space.

Why so relaxed before a race? Many riders don't like a chat...

I think that's totally individual. I have always been quite relaxed before a race, I would even say that chatting relaxes me and makes me feel more comfortable. Some riders like to get in the 'zone' which I totally understand, but for me you can start overthink things which isn't good either.

If no '24' then what number and why?

Probably '54' as it was my first proper number back in the 85cc class in Britain (2001) It was my first full season as a schoolboy and I remember cutting out the numbers by hand myself!

Best piece of advice from Simpson senior...

'If you're feeling good, watch out' Ultimately meaning, when your riding well and feeling invincible, make sure you don't become complacent and make a mistake, have a crash or get injured.

Last time the 'waterworks' came on...

Men aren't supposed to say that they cry! Probably leaving Rachel back home in Scotland at the start of 2015 when I moved back to Belgium and knew I wouldn't see her for a couple months. The long distance relationship was hard for us but it's great to finally be living together now.

Worst injury and which one gives you the most problems now?

I've had my fair share of injuries to be fair. I'd say the worst one was breaking my tibia back in 2009 but the one that gives me the most gyp now would be my right foot that I broke back in 2003. I totally smashed the navicular bone causing the arch of my foot to collapse. It takes me about five minutes each morning to get warmed up and I find myself hobbling about like an old man....

A race when you were most 'in the zone'?

Easy - Assen 2015 first moto. I was really 'up' for the race and thought I could win, I wanted the win.... I got a great start and was about 4th on the first lap. Then I binned it, putting me back to about 9th or 10th. From that moment on I zoned out and got to work...picking off everyone to win. Pretty satisfying race...

Strangest fan interaction?

Matterly Basin 2015 - Two crazy British fans ran on to the track mid-sighting lap wearing only Union Jack underwear and holding British flags showing their support for me! Made me smile... (There is a picture on my Facebook)

Favourite and least favourite rival and why...

Everyone on track is a rival as far as I'm concerned. Everyone that races fair is a good rival. Anyone who doesn't is probably nothing to worry about anyway.

When you get married in October will it be in a kilt and will it be a custom job?

Yes I will be getting married in a Kilt most definitely. I will get one custom made for my wedding, which will be nice to keep and use in the years to come for other special occasions. The real question remains to be asked though? Am I a real Scotsman? The answer.... Off-course.







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AMA-SX

ARLINGTON

AT&T STADIUM • FEBRUARY 20th • Rnd 7 of 17

450SX winner: Ken Roczen, Suzuki

250SX West winner: Cooper Webb, Yamaha



ARLINGTON COULD END UP BEING A SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF THE 2016 450SX CHASE: DUNGEY VS ROCZEN, NOT MUCH BETWEEN THEM AND THE RESULT TOO CLOSE TO CALL UNTIL THE FINAL STAGES. FANS OF BOTH RIDERS AND NEUTRAL SPECTATORS WILL BE HOPING SO. MORE OF THE SAME PLEASE GUYS...

TEXAS SCRAMBLE

By Steve Matthes, Photos by Simon Cudby



Round seven of the Monster Energy Supercross series provided a bit of hope to those of us that are tired of the Ryan Dungey Show. Apologies to Ryan and his Red Bull KTM team for not being excited to watch him run away with race after race this year but let's try and keep the 'clinching' until there's maybe one race to go ok?

Jimmy John's/Soaring Eagle Casino Kenny Roczen took his second win of a year in Dallas, Texas in a great race with Dungey. The #94 was caught and passed by the KTM at one point, stuck back, got caught by Dungey and then held on for the win. The two pulled an enormous gap on third place Rockstar Husqvarna's Jason Anderson and were the class of the field. With the win Roczen got the championship title down to less than a race heading into the second half of the series and when you look at that gap the two riders had on everyone else, it's hard not to think Roczen's going to emerge as the main challenger to Dungey.

Let's take a look at the race a little more closely...

"I just didn't want to let him cruise to a victory and then him having another three points. I'm 'over' seeing him winning. I want to win," said Roczen after the race. "I want to beat him, and that's what I've done. I feel like I want it more than ever. I'm going to keep doing my thing and keep being aggressive every single weekend and put myself in a good position."

And really at this point the only thing Roczen can do is own the races and let the chips fall where they may. He cannot rely on the robot Dungey to make a mistake because he just doesn't do that. Win and get the three points (the difference between first and second) or more on Dungey and see where he stands at the end of the season. There is plenty of racing still to come but Roczen's got to get on a winning streak to have a chance here.



The best night of the year for Roczen: "He was pushing hard. I was pushing hard and we won it," the German said who knows that the series will take an important turn if he can continue to frustrate Dungey



Dungey's teammate Marvin Musquin had a nice night in Dallas even though his sixth on paper may just look so-so. "Moving" Marv was the fastest rider in the first qualifying session and ended up second overall, only 0.1 behind Dungey. Musquin was knocked down by Honda's Trey Canard in the heat race, forced to the semi and then in the main encountered more problems when a collision with Monster Energy Kawasaki's Eli Tomac in the first turn left him dead last. Musquin got up, dusted himself off and proceeded to rip through the field to end up sixth in a great ride. It was a tough track to pass on by all accounts but after the race, Marv explained how he was able to get by some riders.

"I was happy the way I was hitting those whoops, and then the wall. I think I was good right there. Just doing different things than the other guys. It was many 90-degree turns where riders were opening the turns," Musquin mentioned. "One turn was like going over the table-top and I was just cutting inside and I was not going over the table. I was making passes there and then through the whoops too."



But Musquin wasn't satisfied with his great ride: "I want to be with Jason (Anderson) for example, like Seely in third, fourth, or with Ryan or Roczen. I want to be up there but it's racing and it's tough."

The 250SX West Series had a massive swing in Dallas when points leader Joey Savatgy of the Monster Energy Pro Circuit Kawasaki team clipped leader GEICO Honda's Christian Craig's rear wheel in the whoops and cartwheeled in a hard crash. This allowed Yamalube/Star Racing's Cooper Webb to take his first win since the third round of the series and more importantly, take a nine point lead in the series with just two rounds left.

Savatgy salvaged a tenth place after being dead last (and probably having his bell rung a bit) but it was big blow for the Kawi man who was faster than Webb all day in practice. Webb had suffered a bit of bad luck in losing points when his bike broke in Oakland, and now Savatgy was struck by the racing gremlins in a move that most were saying was a racing incident but a few in the pits thought was downright dirty by Craig.



For his part, Craig wasn't having the "dirty rider" talk that he was getting on social media after the race. "You can watch the replay and I'm blocking my line. I'm moving over. I did move over and take his front end out, but he was in the air and I did not want him to take me high the next corner," he explained. "That's what he was going to do. I had a bike - I'd say I had two wheels - on him. I made the pass and I wanted it to stick. I heard that some people aren't happy, and I see it, I see why. He's a points leader and I put him on the ground. It's a racing incident. But I should have won that."



The moment leading up to the collision that could cost Joey Savatgy and the Pro Circuit team their aim of a 2016 title shot. "We've got a break now, which will give the team and I a chance to work on a few things to come back swinging," he said afterwards...meanwhile Webb takes win number four of the year (left) as Musquin continues to impress on the 450SX-F



The buzz in the pits has been about Cycle Trader Yamaha's Colt Nichols and his stand-out rides week after week in the 250SX class. The Oklahoman has been the surprise of the series with great rides, many of them from the back of the pack. Nichols is already being talked to by many of the direct OEM support teams for a ride next year and even if his motocross season doesn't go as well as he would like, it seems that he's set for '17.

After a couple of inspiring rides to start the season, Chad Reed's currently mired in a three race slump where he's yet to break the top five. Reed's perhaps reached the bottom of his slump this weekend when he fell on the last lap while eighth and ended up twelfth. Being the veteran of the series, it wasn't expected that Chad would be able to challenge the young stars week in and week out but Dallas was his worst supercross in a while as even in qualifying the #22 struggled and ended up 15th overall. The good news for Reed is this weekend it's Atlanta where he won last year.

Colt Nichols, like Mitchell Oldenburg, is generating talk for the future and is another Yamaha rider currently showing the renewed package that is the YZ250F





Zach Osborne back in form and on the gas for his third podium finish of the year in 250SX









AMA-SX CLASSIFICATION & CHAMPIONSHIP

AMA 450SX RESULT		
Riders		
1	Ken Roczen, GER	Suzuki
2	Ryan Dungey, USA	KTM
3	Jason Anderson, USA	Husqvarna
4	Cole Seely, USA	Honda
5	Eli Tomac, USA	Kawasaki

AMA 250SX WEST RESULT		
Riders		
1	Cooper Webb, USA	Yamaha
2	Christian Craig, USA	Honda
3	Zach Osborne, USA	Husqvarna
4	Colt Nichols, USA	Yamaha
5	Mitchell Oldenburg, USA	KTM

AMA 450SX STANDINGS (AFTER 7 OF 17 ROUNDS)		
Riders		Points
1	Ryan Dungey	166
2	Ken Roczen	143
3	James Anderson	131
4	Cole Seely	121
5	Eli Tomac	119

AMA 250SX WEST STANDINGS (AFTER 7 OF 8 ROUNDS)		
Riders		Points
1	Cooper Webb	145
2	Joey Savatgy	134
3	Christian Craig	129
4	Colt Nichols	117
5	Zach Osborne	110



DIALOGUE FROM DALLAS...

By Steve Matthes

The rumors are out there about Roczen moving to Honda next year (a connected source told me this weekend that he heard it was done) and we asked Kenny about that and predictably he wouldn't budge much in shedding much light on his new home in '17 and beyond.

"I honestly don't know. It's out of my hands and I'm doing my job and talking to my agent about what's going on. I'm trying to not worry about anything. I'm pretty happy where I'm at in the moment and I don't want to put anything in my head. I'm enjoying life, riding my dirt bike and the racing. I could care less about all that other stuff. It's going to come eventually and we'll all know soon."

-We've seen Ryan Dungey be a bit aggressive at the start of practice each week with getting out first and laying down laps. Trainer Aldon Baker has admitted that this is part of a strategy and hey, it's working. I wrote a couple of weeks ago that it wouldn't be long until one of Dungey's competitors tries to get out first and "rattle" his cage a bit. Well it was Roczen this week who jammed his way past Dungey in the first turn in an aggressive move for practice and then tried to pull away but unfortunately for him made a mistake and Dungey got by. When asked about it after the race, Roczen just smiled.

-The partnership of Fly 360 Cameras and Chad Reed came about last summer when Peter Adderton, the former CEO of Boost Mobile and Amp'd Mobile, became CEO of the newest actions sports camera. Reed famously got upset with the outdoor promoters and their exclusive deal with GoPro and shortly after, coincidence or not, folded his team and quit the motocross

series. Well Fly 360 is back with Reed again as well as a big team sponsor of the new factory Yamaha effort as well as on Monster Pro Circuit. A couple of weeks ago Adderton released a poorly worded Instagram post about how Monster Energy is forcing Fly 360 off the teams because Fly 360 chose to use green in their logos. Of course when doing some digging there's more to this than what Adderton posted.

Monster Energy was indeed upset with Fly 360 using green in their logo but it was also the hiring of promotional models that looked a lot like Monster girls, the marketing of the camera on spots with riders that Monster has secured and so on and so on. My sources tell me that Monster had a meeting with Adderton about this and trying to get some separation between the companies when Adderton just decided to take his frustrations public before any compromise can be reached. Well we're a couple weeks away from that post and it's business as usual with Monster and Fly 360. Everyone's happy, there are no logos being removed and cooler heads prevailed. As someone close to the situation but with no stake in the game told me "It's massive egos of Monster butting up against the massive ego of Adderton and this is what happens". So stay tuned as the green claw turns...

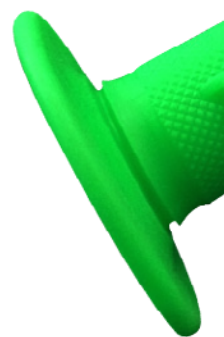
-The mystery inside a riddle that is Rockstar Husky's Christophe Pourcel continued in Dallas with his strong ride to eighth. Pourcel had been putting in fast laps every week during qualifying but when it came to the race he seemed to want nothing to do with actually competing, many times being the last factory rider in the mains finishing between 12th and 14th.



The whole time Pourcel had told media members that he'll be much better at round seven when he gets comfortable and what do you know? Round seven in Dallas he qualified out of the heat and ran solid laps inside the top ten the whole main event. It was approximately 377% more effort than he had been putting in and the Frenchman's vow to be more competitive was correct.

-Honda's Trey Canard hasn't had a great start to his supercross season with some crashes, an injury that caused him to miss two races mixed in with his usual speed. In San Diego he made contact with Ryan Dungey in a rhythm where he tripped out while most riders were going double/single. A collision with Dungey resulted in a meeting between the FIM's John Gallagher and Canard about being more aware on the track when things turned hostile. Canard tapped Gallagher in the chest with his water bottle that came dangerously close to escalating a situation that wasn't meant to be anything major. Tensions got high but in the end Canard got away with just a warning.







PRO TAPER

It seems like such a minor detail but hand-grips can be a particularly fussy component of a motorcycle for a rider (understandable right? It's the key contact area with the bike...). Through levels of racing users prefer different compounds, patterns and thickness and will be diligent about changing the material. As you'd expect from prolific handlebar manufacturer Pro Taper the company have decent and worthwhile offerings and are not shy with their colouring. 'PT' claim that their Neon series has 'super soft, specially formulated synthetic rubber compound (that improves bonding with the bars)...in a motocross racing inspired half waffle grip pattern (that eases repositioning of the hands)'. Made in the USA they retail for ten dollars and can be found in any Pro Taper distributor or stockist.

<http://www.protaper.com/default/controls/grips/neon-half-waffle-grips.html>



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PRODUCTS

YCF

Prolific French minibike manufacturer YCF have unveiled details of their 2016 catalogue with a startling choice of sixteen models spanning 50cc to 190 and the first electric dirtbike for kids: the YCF50E. Motocross is mixed with Supermoto and the two strongest aspects of the China-built YCF range involves firstly the price and secondly the ability to customise the ride with a comprehensive selection of coloured parts from chains, grips to wheels, shocks and decals.

The 50E runs with a 48V magnet DC motor powered by a lithium battery. Only 36 kilos in weight it also 550mm in seat height. It is priced at 1799 euros. The 50A leads up to the semi-automatic F88S (1199 euros) and so on through fully-geared and larger models. Tough and a fun little template for modifications and 'pimping' it is no surprise that YCF have grown immeasurably in the last five years with their motorcycles. For parents considering their kids' first introduction to biking then there is plenty of scope and interest here.

Click to see the catalogue

<http://ycf-riding.com/uploads/catalogue/56c736f1187e0.pdf>





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KTM



UPSIDE DOWN IN AUS...

By David Emmett

If you were like me then you had pencilled Jorge Lorenzo's name onto the MotoGP trophy after the test at Sepang...and if you were like me again you were left feeling pretty stupid about that after the MotoGP test at Phillip Island. Jorge Lorenzo's lead of nearly a second over the rest of the field? Blown clear away by the chill winds blasting across the Bass Strait. Phillip Island made Lorenzo look human once again, as the reigning world champion struggled with a lack of feel from the front end, something that had not been a problem in Sepang. Different tracks throw up different challenges – and none throw up as unique a challenge as Phillip Island – and riders and bikes sink or swim depending on how they deal with the adversity.

What Phillip Island showed us all is that it is still very early in the transition to the new era of MotoGP. The rise and 'fall' of Lorenzo was a stark reminder of that. Michelin is still experimenting with tyres in search of the right compounds and construction to use during 2016, and more changes are likely to come as the season progresses. Every team and factory is working on the electronics, making progress in leaps and starts. Yamaha, and especially Ducati, began with a head start, having already gained some experience with the common software and having engines which are fairly usable even without any electronic help. Between Sepang and Phillip Island, Honda made a big step forward, building on the data from the test in Malaysia to iron out many of the problems they had been having in early February. While Yamaha and Ducati inched forward, Honda were advancing in seven league boots.

This is one advantage of the software over the previous situation. The common software imposes a common performance ceiling, a limit to what is possible with the spec electronics. Some teams and factories approach that limit quickly, others

meander towards it, but eventually, both will get as close as possible to reaching it. Advantages are only temporary, if factories are willing to put in the work.

We face a similar situation with the tyres. Eventually, everyone will find a way to manage the new Michelins, and turn up and be as competitive as they can be at every race. This does not mean that everyone has an equal chance of winning, of course: talent always prevails, and the same names will rise to the top. What this preseason testing is showing is that there may be a couple of new names joining the established MotoGP powerhouses.

Maverick Viñales is clearly one of those. He had a decent test at Sepang, the new engine and seamless gearbox of the Suzuki GSX-RR a big improvement over last year's bike. At Phillip Island, he stunned the field, ending the test as fastest overall. Viñales was not just quick, he was also consistent, rattling out a string of fast laps on the last two days of the test, the days least affected by the weather. He was easily a match for Marc Márquez, the Repsol Honda man making huge progress at Phillip Island, and was comfortably ahead of Valentino Rossi, who effectively outclassed his Movistar Yamaha teammate Jorge Lorenzo.

Here come the caveats. Viñales was deeply impressive, certainly, but Phillip Island is a track which the Spaniard loves, and at which he went very well last year, on a woefully underpowered Suzuki GSX-RR. It is a track mastered more by testicular fortitude than by technical refinement, a circuit where bravery and adrenaline can find you the extra tenth or two, which a less exciting track would not provoke from a rider.



Marc Márquez was fast too, but Phillip Island lacks the slow corners that were hurting the Hondas on acceleration. The new engine is an improvement, and worked reasonably well even in the cooler temperatures at PI, but the problem was never when accelerating in fourth gear. Qatar should see the final confirmation of Honda's design choices, with both Márquez and Dani Pedrosa concentrating on the new engine Honda had introduced at Sepang. While it is still far from ideal, the headway HRC are making with the common software could turn it into a viable option after all. If the Qatar test throws up some real surprises, then Honda are in for yet another long and painful year.

Then there are the Ducatis. Intriguingly, both Hector Barbera and Loris Baz finished well ahead of the factory Ducatis, despite the Avintia boys riding a Desmosedici GP14.2. Which is a motorcycle two full iterations behind the bikes ridden by Andreas Iannone and Dovizioso, the GP16 – or D16GP, as we must learn to call it – and yet is consistently outperforming it. Clearly, the fact that the Avintia team has over a year's experience with the 14.2, and with the common software it was running last year, gives them a major advantage at this stage in the season. Avintia have been working on refining their package since Valencia last year, while the factory boys are still working through their test programme to ensure that the D16GP is a genuine improvement on last year's bike. That doesn't mean that the performance by Barbera and Baz – the Frenchman in particular was impressively consistent – doesn't mean anything. But they must also fear that others will catch up.

Phillip Island also saw the first hints of the whirlwind which will be MotoGP Silly Season 2016 appear on the horizon. Maverick Viñales' market stock is already very high, but his speed at Phillip Island put interest in him through the roof. Both Honda and Yamaha are keen to get the Spaniard's signature, but both factories also have similar problems. At Yamaha, Viñales could not go into the factory team, as both Jorge Lorenzo and Valentino Rossi are keen to stay. Honda are no better, with Emilio Alzamora doing

his utmost to hold any rider capable of genuinely challenging the supremacy of Márquez out of the factory Honda squad. There may technically be an empty seat at Repsol Honda, that doesn't necessarily mean that the Japanese factory are free to fill it without the permission of Márquez' manager.

At Phillip Island, Jorge Lorenzo once again reiterated seriously that he would like to renew his contract before the season starts. Did Lorenzo mean it, or was he using Yamaha as leverage to secure a bigger, more favourable deal with one of their rivals? Does Lorenzo really want to retire with Yamaha, or is this merely a ploy to squeeze yet more money out of Ducati when he signs with them? At the moment, we must believe Lorenzo at his word. But it won't hurt to measure his words against his actions, in the run up to the biggest payday of them all.

The Phillip Island test raised more questions than it answered, even though it answered plenty. That points to a fascinating prospect for the 2016 MotoGP season, with much still completely up in the air. This should be a truly fascinating year.





FEATURE

World Superbike might be home to the fiery Ducati red, a brand new blue Yamaha bullet, America's last world champion and was the foraging ground for Germany's fastest and most advanced motorcycle in an age, but the truth is that the series is distinctly green. There is little doubt that Kawasaki are currently the main Superbike force with their pairing of Jonathan Rea and Tom Sykes and a new ZX-10R that the team and manufacturer claim is only getting faster and better

GET CLOSER (IF YOU CAN...)

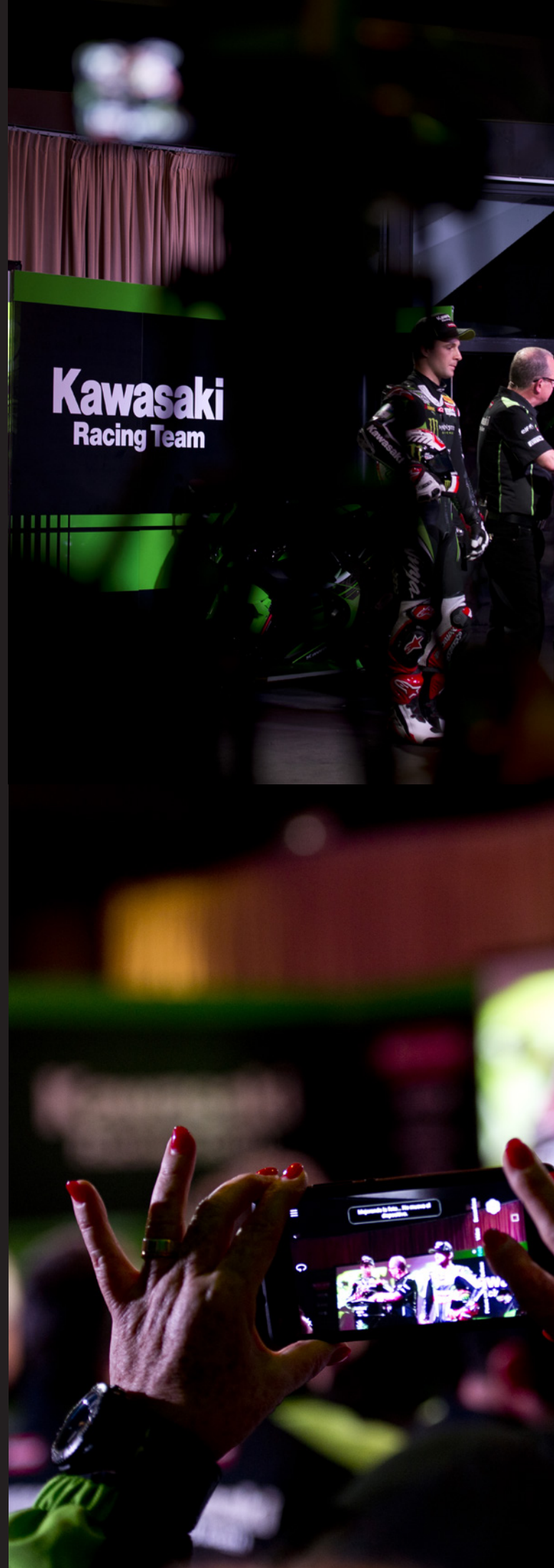
By Adam Wheeler, Photos by GeeBee Images



The 2016 presentation of the team took place in Barcelona's Montjuic Park and in fitting with the leafiest part of the Catalan metropolis, Kawasaki – represented by the Provec racing team located a wheel chunk from the Montmelo F1/MotoGP track around 15km out of the city – have turned the Esferic conference room various shades of emerald.

There is a big turnout. Sponsors from the likes of large national dealer Motocard to Kawasaki staff, a smattering of press and even some Catalan government dignitaries take part in a lengthy overview of the crew's emphatic footprint in Superbike in just four years. Emerging from Supersport with distinction, the team immediately hit the ground sprinting with the ZX-10R and Tom Sykes in 2012 with Pole Position and a podium finish at Phillip Island for their debut; a location that shortly beckons for the final test and the opening dash of 2016.

Among the twenty-five strong roster for KRT is the British racing duo of Sykes and Rea. Both riders cut lean and forceful figures on the stage. Their stance and demeanour barely hides the different agendas that each carry for '16: Rea relaxed, content and still on that wave of championship elation from 2015 when he came into the squad as a Kawasaki rookie and not only ripped apart the series but also nudged the well-installed Sykes to the side of the stage. The 2013 champion – and the man who memorably missed the '12 crown by just half a point – is invigorated by the '16 ZX-10R and his leading pace in testing, almost as if he is ready to reclaim lost status. It's the 30 year old we corner first...





You sound very motivated and buoyant for the season start...

You have to be! 2015 was a step back and in terms of my performance I was not able to do what I wanted. It was also a very good 'schooling' year and we learnt a lot. We have better 'tools' from Kawasaki and I'm very happy, relaxed and motivated. I feel that we have the right package to go racing.

The cliché is 'don't put much into tests' but do you feel you have made a statement already with your times?

In a way 'no', in a way 'yes' because I haven't been chasing lap-times and they have just come and have also been very competitive. The real action is in the racing but I feel everything is 'there' to be better than last year. We struggled towards the end of the races [last year] and this time I feel we can actually improve. On the back of this information [from the tests] I'm very relaxed for this season.

You must have been dismayed in 2015 but then it must have become motivating at some point with Jonathan doing so well next to you...

I tried to do the best I could and unfortunately it wasn't good enough; I was limited on how I wanted to ride the bike. It was a bit of a struggle but I learned a lot so I have to be grateful. It was a tough season. Jonathan's riding style and the nature of the technical regulations was an utter marriage. They were 'at one'. I think this year could be different.

Many fans are already expecting a battle between the two of you, nevermind the rest of the grid. It could get quite juicy down the line couldn't it?

Definitely. There are a couple of guys in the team who have already set up that environment. I've always been a team player and worked for Kawasaki Racing Team but last year it became divided quite quickly and we saw the introduction of 'Team 65' and as a 'team rider' you feel that is a bit of a statement. At the end of the day we know where we stand this year and we know where we need to be to bring the battle a little bit more to the table.

What are the differences on the ZX-10R now?

It is more of a racing bike. Last year I felt like I had to 'ride' more and felt like I could never get close to 100% of my racing capabilities. Kawasaki have done a great job and, obviously, they have technical restrictions with what they can do on a road bike but here they have made a great compromise for a bike that is good on the track as it is on the road. It gives us a great base to work from. It is clear to see that testing has been a bit better for us but I am not counting my chickens because there is still work to be done. I know we are closer to the mark.







Jonathan Rea strides over after performing some interviews for the Dorna TV crew. No.1 plate duly earned the 29 year old father of two now has to learn about 'defence' and knows that the orientation of 2016 is another level from his 'understudy' role at the beginning of 2015. Away from the slicks momentarily and JR's fondness for motocross is widely known. In the days leading up to the Barcelona function '65' had been riding with British Championship stars Elliot Banks Browne and Lewis Tombs in Catalunya while a certain '93' from MotoGP was also on the dirt. Having already chatted about his day job we thought to quiz the Irishman on his hobby...

Last year you were one of the very few who speculated over Ryan Villopoto's reasons for coming to MXGP and you seemed to be on the money as he retired before the season was out. So...what's your prediction this year?

You want me to Mystic Meg [tabloid fortune teller] this year?!

Give it your best shot...

I'm really not sure. It is clear that when [Tony] Cairoli is healthy then he is one of the fastest guys in the world. I'm intrigued to see how Clement [Desalle – the interview was made prior to the Belgian's radius break] gets on with the Kawasaki. Having been in the Kawasaki family a bit longer I understand the effort they also put into motocross. Almost three weeks ago I was in KHI [in Japan] and saw the [KX] bikes and what goes into them. I'd like to see him do a good job but I think Febvre blind-sided everyone last year didn't he? To come in as a rookie and do so well...I wouldn't want to call it: there are so many! Gautier Paulin is another. They just have to stay healthy and Febvre proved that last year. Nobody was talking about him after two rounds but he was the

smartest guy out there and made the right decisions. He deserved that championship. Like in most forms of racing the smartest guys usually tends to win.

Cairoli just signed a new three year deal with KTM at 30 years of age...

If he still has the speed then why not? It is clear he is a hard worker and he has been lucky in his career that he hasn't had too many really hard setbacks and injuries. It is not effortless but he has quite an economical style as well. KTM are clever to have him and after these three years he has a career link with them. It is kinda like a Rossi situation. Nobody is asking "is 36-37 too old?" If Antonio is still strong and still fast then he'll 'turn up'.

There was a rumour about you in 2015 possibly entering the last round of the British Motocross Championship. Was that true?

Not the last one but the penultimate race. I had an agreement with Kawasaki Motor Europe Racing Manager Steve Guttridge that if I won in Sepang then I'd race Preston Docks... but Chaz [Davies] beat me to it and it meant I didn't have to rush home to prep bikes! I did a lot of training in December with Graeme Irwin and just last week with Elliott Banks Browne and Lewy [Tombs]. Marquez was also riding. It was how I prepared last year. I've just recovered from a virus where I was drained and with zero motivation but now I'm happy because I've been riding my bike again.

Are you any better as a motocrosser now? Especially as you rode with McGrath last year...

Better? I don't ride enough. I don't get home enough because of the travelling schedule. When I do get back then I get some solid days.

Were you quicker than Marquez?

On this track – Ponts – he was slightly faster, maybe by a second. I just a little bit slower than Lewy and a few seconds slower than Elliott. Marquez was ripping that day. He rides motocross like he rides in MotoGP – so aggressive and fast – but fairplay because I did not expect him to be that quick. I also rode with Bradley [Smith]. We rode for the day at Montmelo [motocross track behind the F1/MotoGP venue]. He was super fast but then he was also a good schoolboy racer.

Talking about Superbike has being world champion fulfilled what you expected of winning a title? Has there been a lot more fuss?

I was a little bit lucky because I won it early, so a lot of the pressure was off at the end of the season. I was able to relax with my family and the week after Qatar we had our second child. It was a big step back to reality. As a kid – well not even a kid, maybe five/six years ago – I was commentating on myself riding bicycles around the house and dreamt of my championship party! It was something I thought about and had visions of private planes, Vegas, champagne and nightclubs but the truth is that it was normal! The first speech after the championship dinner by Guim [Team Manager] was that we all had to be in the pit box by 8.30 in the morning to do photos before the test! There wasn't that massive 'release' or 'let go' or last round 'Troy-Colin' head-to-head dose of emotion. In the summer break I had that big build-up to only score six points and we'd been killing it up until that point and our worst result had been a podium finish. So when 'it' happened it was more like relief; thank god we did our job. We'd had an incredible season and it was time to motivate ourselves for Magny Cours and we doubled-up there and we went to Qatar where we had a DNF but also a good

first race. So I was able to remotivate myself before the season had finished and that was just as satisfying as Jerez.

You had it last year but will you be more aware and conscious of that large target on your back this season?

Of course you are more aware of it because I am human and I have failings and emotions. I just have to be clever and manage the year and try to do it in the same way as I did last year. I had a good conversation with my team manager and doctor today and I'm feeling a bit different about things. Last year there was much less pressure. I felt like the 'number two guy' and there was a lot of motivation to stake my claim in the team and come-in under the radar and do a good job. This year the level we set in 2015 is almost unsustainable. The only season that was better was Colin [Edwards] in '02 and that was the greatest of all-time. Trying to achieve that same level is something we have to put to the back of our minds and attack every race weekend the same. The guys I have on my side of the box are so amazing at what they do but we also have this relationship where we just clicked. Going to the track felt like good fun. I hope this year we can keep that. Sure, everyone feels it [the pressure] this bike has been at the front for so many years now that we are not here just to ride around and have fun. We have to be at the front. A mark of our season will be how we deal with the tough days. We didn't face so many last season...but how we rebound from any difficult moments will define our year.







PRO CIRCUIT

Just a couple of weeks to wait until Monster Energy Pro Circuit fans can get their hands on the team's official sweatshirt and jackets with the product due to ship in the first week of March and the final months of winter and into spring. The models are the Covert (hooded zip-up fleece 60% cotton, 40% polyester construction) and Blaze while the Vegas is a 100% polyester lightweight windbreaker and the Parka is a midweight lined jacket with water resistant coating. The Covert and Blaze are available for 60 dollars while the Vegas is 90 and the Parka 125. For more info check out the site

www.procircuit.com



STEALTHY NINJA

By Roland Brown,
Photos by Ula Serra and Double Red

Kawasaki's Ninja ZX-10R ruled the World Superbike racetracks last season, winning 18 of the 26 races in the hands of Tom Sykes and new champion Jonathan Rea. But the production ZX-10R was never going to manage a similar impact in the showrooms, where the ageing four was overshadowed by the firm's own supercharged Ninja H2s and some spectacular new 200bhp rivals. This year it's the turn of the ZX-10R to be updated...



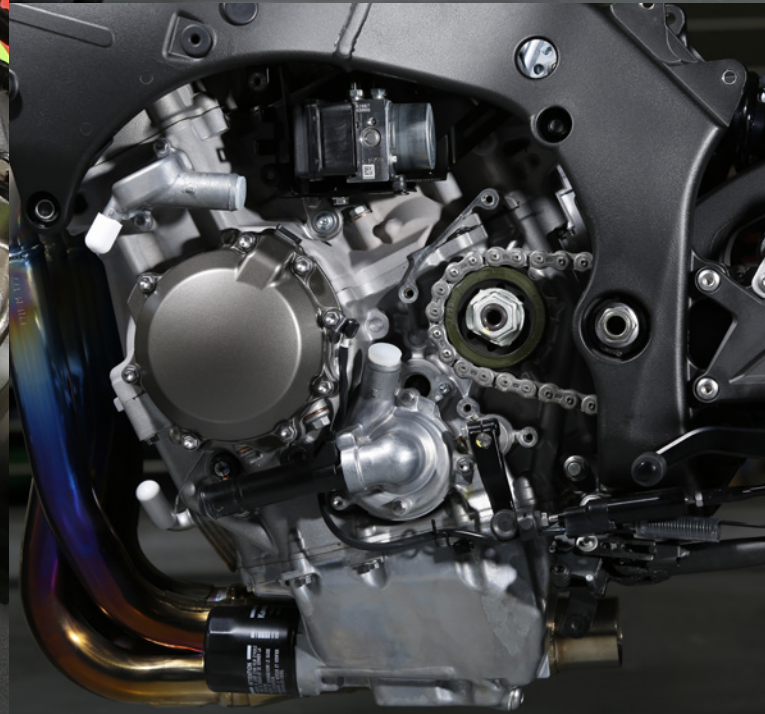
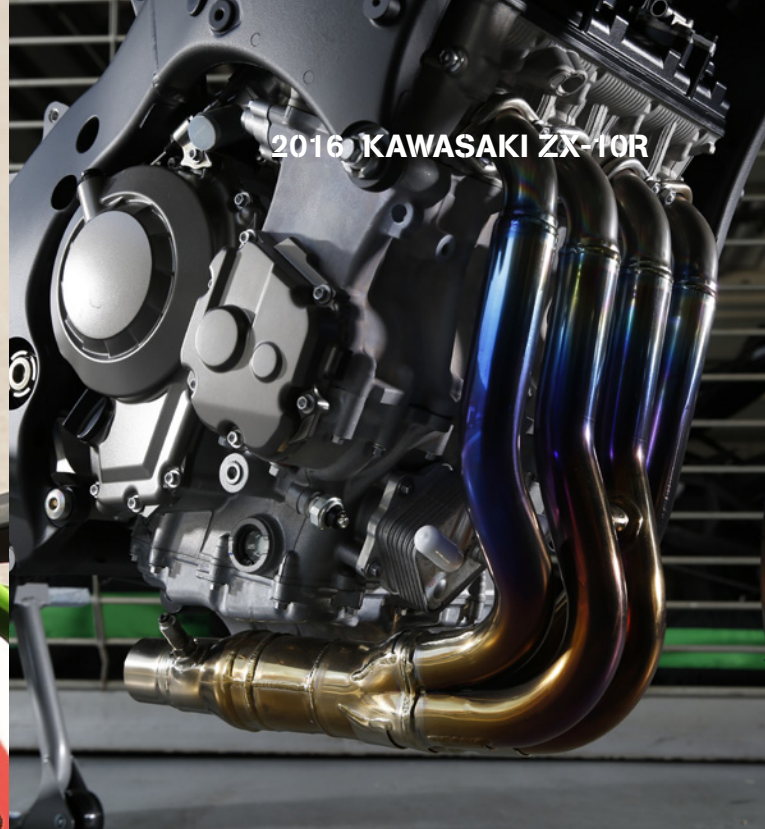
TEST

Kawasaki isn't wasting that World Superbike experience. Project leader Yoshimoto Matsuda, who was previously in charge of developing the firm's MotoGP racer, possibly considered making a more rounded, versatile sports bike... but only for a few nanoseconds. Then he decided to create a hard-core, uncompromisingly track-focused ZX-10R based as closely as possible on that WSBK winner.

The new bike looks very similar to the old, but it's virtually all new. Sykes, who has been developing the factory ZX-10R along with his Dutch crew chief Marcel Duinker since 2011, regards the most important change to be the reduced engine inertia, mainly from a lighter crankshaft, that let the bike rev and turn more quickly. Now the production bike follows suit, with a lighter crank that reduces inertia by 20 per cent.

The long list of other engine-related updates includes new camshafts, clutch, pistons and a bigger airbox. A new exhaust system, made mainly of titanium, helps the ZX-10R become the first open-class sports bike to meet Euro 4 emissions regulations. Kawasaki also revamped the electronics package, combining their own software with Bosch's six-axis IMU sensor, as used by rivals including Ducati's 1299 Panigale.







TEST



A close-up, low-angle shot of the front left corner of a green and black Kawasaki ZX-10R motorcycle. The bike is positioned on a grey asphalt racetrack, leaning slightly into a turn. The background is heavily blurred due to motion, showing a multi-tiered grandstand with green and yellow seats, and a modern building with large white rectangular openings. The overall scene conveys a sense of high speed and professional racing.

2016 KAWASAKI ZX-10R

**“KAWASAKI CLEARLY ISN’T ESPECIALLY
FUSSED ABOUT STREET-RELATED NICETIES...
THIS ZX-10R WAS NOT CREATED PRIMARILY AS
A RAPID YET WELL-ROUNDED ROADSTER...”**

TEST

Sykes' key chassis change on the racebike involved putting more weight on its front wheel, which improved front-end feel and agility. The production Ninja follows this too, thanks to a new frame that brings its steering head closer to the rider, plus a longer and more rigid swing-arm that also helps shift weight forwards. Suspension is also new: race-developed components from Japanese specialist Showa.

It adds up to a fearsomely fast bike that was a blast to ride at the hot and humid Sepang circuit. On the Malaysian track's two straights the ZX-10R screamed to about 150mph with a gear and plenty more speed to come. And the Kawasaki felt good at slower speeds too, pulling hard and crisply through the midrange although like the outgoing model it lacked a little oomph below 7000rpm. It also keeps the previous bike's tall first gear, which wasn't a problem on the track but is not ideal for more modest roadgoing speeds.



The Ninja was also well supported by its new electronics package. The five-way adjustable traction control system coped with severe throttle abuse on corner exits, and allowed just the right amount of wheelie for maximum acceleration. Other features include launch control, an engine brake function and the ability to cut power by 20 or 40 per cent, for example in bad weather.

Chassis performance was also very impressive, especially the ease with which the bike changed direction, despite the fact that at 206kg with fuel it's slightly heavier than the previous model due to additions required by Euro 4. The Kawasaki felt slightly roomier than some rivals, notably Yamaha's YZF-R1, and was also very stable under acceleration, doubtless helped by a new electronic Öhlins steering damper.



Its Showa suspension worked superbly, the distinctive Balance Free Front Forks with their long, racer-like damping chambers being well complemented by the same Japanese firm's compact BFRC (Balance Free Rear Cushion) lite shock. This is recent top-level racing technology transferred to the street.

The Kawasaki's brakes are also upgraded, with Brembo's rigid M50 Monobloc calipers biting larger, 330mm front discs. The bike's composure under hard braking was as impressive as its sheer stopping power. Initially it dived slightly too much but was improved by tweaking of the sensitive Showa forks.

If the new Ninja has a weakness it's arguably that its track focus means that it lacks the rider-friendly features that make some rivals more rounded roadsters. It doesn't offer semi-active suspension, or a colourful TFT instrument console, let alone the heated hand-grips and cruise control that are popular options on BMW's S1000R.

2016 KAWASAKI ZX-10R





2016 KAWASAKI ZX-10R

Kawasaki clearly isn't especially fussed about street-related niceties such as those. This ZX-10R was not created primarily as a rapid yet well-rounded roadster. It was inspired by the World Superbike champion's factory machine, and developed to be as hard and fast as possible, primarily on track. For plenty of riders that will be a large part of its appeal.

Those riders will be glad that the ZX-10R is competitively priced against rivals including the S1000RR and R1, even in its slightly more expensive Winter Test Edition, a limited-edition version that comes with black paintwork and an Akrapovic silencer. Whether it can beat them for road and track performance remains to be seen, but this revamped, race-developed Ninja definitely puts Kawasaki back in the game.







MICHELIN (UK)

Interesting initiative this by Michelin UK. Riders buying (and providing proof of purchase) a set of Michelin Starcross (excluding junior), Michelin S12 XC or Michelin M12 XC in 2016 are eligible to apply for the 'Starcross Days'; essentially practice days run by the MX Nationals team at Preston Docks, Foxhills, Canada Heights and Hawkstone Park for just £19. Groups will be split by ability and tyre and technical advice will be available all day. The main attraction is the chance to ride at renowned venues like Hawkstone and Canada Heights while also benefiting from the French manufacturers guidance when it comes to off-road rubber. To learn more click the link.

www.mxnationals.co.uk/MichelinStarcrossDays



BACKPAGE

Monster Energy Girls
by Monster Energy







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'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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